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THE PROBLEM OF ULSTER

BY SYDNEY BROOKS

THE spectacle of a portion of Ireland passionately proclaiming at once its loyalty to the British Crown and its determination to resist by force an Act of Parliament when it receives the Royal Assent has probably both mystified the world and intrigued it. I can well imagine that Americans especially, with their traditional interest in Irish affairs, have watched it with equal amusement and perplexity. What lies behind it all? What are the realities of the Ulster situation? Is it merely the froth and bluster of politicians bent on terrorizing their opponents and impressing them with the utmost possible show of power so as to be better placed for bargaining with them when the appropriate hour has struck? Or does it represent one of those elemental outbursts of feeling and conviction that no statesmanship can resist for long and from which anything and everything may be expected? Are we really destined in the twentieth century and in the United Kingdom to witness a convulsion that will be scarcely distinguishable from civil war? Is there any serious likelihood that Ulster will carry out its threat to establish a Provisional Government of its own, and, if it does, what are the chances of success in so unusual and desperate an enterprise? Such questions as these must, I suppose, have crossed the minds of all who have heard or read of the queer doings of which Ulster during the past eighteen months has been the scene—of the raising and drilling of volunteer troops, of the signing of solemn covenants, of the open preparations for an active resistance to Home Rule. In this article I shall hope to pass in review the chief elements, social, political, historical, and sectarian, that make up the complex and abnormal problem which is known as the Ulster Question.

It is well understood in Great Britain, but may not be

equally appreciated in the United States, that the title itself is a misnomer, and that the question is not one of Ulster as a whole, but only a part of it. What men mean when they talk of the problem of Ulster is the problem of the four counties of Antrim, Down, Derry, and Armagh, in which are situated the industrial centers of Belfast and Londonderry and in which the Protestants and Unionists outnumber the Catholics and Home-Rulers in the proportion, roughly speaking, of seven to three. Taking the Province from end to end, the population is pretty evenly divided between the members of the two faiths, while its representation in Parliament shows an actual majority of one in favor of Home Rule. Even in Armagh and Derry, two of the four Protestant counties, the Catholics form forty-five per cent. of the whole; and in Belfast they are a quarter of the inhabitants. These figures are worth bearing in mind because they indicate that if ever the Provisional Government were to be established it would be confronted on the spot by a considerable and exceedingly hostile Catholic minority. The four northeastern counties differ profoundly not only from the rest of Ulster, but from the rest of Ireland. In the first place, Protestants predominate in them; secondly, they return to the House of Commons over twice as many Unionists as Home Rulers; thirdly, they depend for their prosperity in the main upon industrial pursuits; fourthly, their Protestant citizens are the only more or less compact body in Ireland that can trace a partial descent to the colonists, who from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries were planted in the country in the interests of England; and fifthly, and this is a curious and illuminating fact, in them alone does one encounter any real apprehension that Home Rule would lead to the persecution of the Protestants by the Catholics. Outside of Ulster there are perhaps 250,000 Protestants scattered over Ireland. They are surrounded and vastly outnumbered by Catholics who have no particular reason for loving them and who have all the machinery of local government in their hands. Yet from these Protestants, isolated, defenseless, virtually disfranchised, there comes hardly a single complaint of Catholic bigotry or intolerance. It is only in the counties where the Protestants form a comparatively cohesive group and where they outnumber the Catholics, as I have said, in the ratio of seven to three, that the fear is expressed that an

Irish Parliament sitting in Dublin will inaugurate a régime of religious persecution. That is a paradox the significance of which will, I hope, become clear as we go along.

The inwardness of any movement can often best be gauged by studying it in its most extreme form, and Belfast, which is the headquarters of Ulsteria and its financial base, may be taken as a compendium of its spirit and aims. It is a city of inexhaustible industrial marvels. It claims to have the largest shipyard, the largest linen-mill, and the largest rope, tobacco, and mineral-water factories in the world. Perhaps nowhere on earth do 390,000 people produce so much wealth as in Belfast or produce it, since every ton of coal they use has to be imported, under greater disabilities. It is the Chicago of Ireland, and its industrial record constitutes one of the greatest and most inspiring achievements in the history of commerce. Any one who makes the tour of Ireland feels, on reaching Londonderry and Belfast, that he is for the first time in contact with the atmosphere and problems of a modern manufacturing city. These two towns, in tone and spirit, in their social structure, their instinctive ways of looking at things, and their economic formation, stand in a category of their own, and have little or no affinity with Limerick, Cork, Waterford, or even Dublin; while the gap that separates them from the smaller urban centers, that except in Ireland would not for a moment aspire to the name of towns, is the gap of the entire industrial revolution. Moreover, it so happens that their principal businesses are exporting businesses, that Ireland is rather their workshop than their market, that their commercial relations with it, while of course considerable, are small by comparison with their relations with the outside world, and that there has thus never been established between the industrial north and the agricultural south and west any deep communion either of interests or of sympathies.

It goes without saying, for any one who is acquainted with even the alphabet of Irish life, that all the Belfast industries are in the hands of Protestants, that practically every one one meets in the city of any commercial or social or public importance is of the same faith, and that the Catholics belong with hardly an exception to the employed and not the employing class. For tenacity, enterprise, and in all the qualities that make for commercial efficiency of

the highest order, one would instinctively match the Belfast manufacturers against any on earth. They are a rough-tongued, hard-headed, not particularly ingratiating or cultivated set of men or particularly humane or far-sighted in their treatment of labor, but with a clearness of business vision, a remorseless energy and fixity of purpose in pursuing their ends, and a general ruggedness of character that command one's instant respect. And these are characteristics that run with astonishing consistency through all the Ulster Protestants of whatever class and occupation. Taking them as a community, they are as dour, stubborn, self-willed, and self-reliant a body of men as one is ever likely to come across, taciturn of speech, fixed in all their ideas, obstinately faithful to the men who are capable of winning their reluctant trust, approximating much nearer to the Scottish than the English type, and absolutely differentiated from the ordinary Catholic Irishman of the south and west. They have a far stronger capacity for hate than for affection; they are narrow with something of the simplicity and earnestness of a Cromwellian Puritan; the rougher elements among them are as turbulent a mob as you will find in all Europe; and mingling with all these traits is an intense strain of emotionalism. They are the hardest workers, the best artisans, and the most provident farmers in Ireland.

History has left its stamp on them as on all Irishmen, but in their case it is like a disfiguring and even repulsive birthmark. They have inherited from the past memories and traditions of the bitterest antagonism toward their Catholic fellow-subjects. One must remember that the ancestors or at any rate the co-religionists of these Ulster stalwarts were settled in the north of Ireland to uphold Protestantism and establish a sphere of English influence; that time and again the two creeds clashed in murderous and devastating wars from which in the end the Protestants emerged victorious; that up almost to our own time their descendants lorded it over their Catholic neighbors with a high-handed ascendancy; and that they still import into their attitude toward the ancient faith and its adherents not only an almost Elizabethan fanaticism, but the unlovely truculence of "colonists" who regard "the natives" as an inferior species. Those are the two operative factors behind nine-tenths of Ulster's opposition to Home Rule—bigotry based on ignorance and a profound social contempt. The Belfast Orange-

man looks upon the idea of being governed by a Parliament in which Catholics and farmers will necessarily predominate much as a white planter in Texas would regard a proposal to hand over the administration of his State to the negroes. It is not merely an insult; it seems to him positively unnatural, something that involves him in a personal degradation, and that aims at lowering him to the level of an alien and abject civilization. And if one asks how such a view can still hold its own in the twentieth century and in a great commercial city like Belfast, the answer, or one of the answers, is to be found in that strain of emotionalism which, as I have said, runs through the Ulster Protestants. They still celebrate the Battle of the Boyne and the Siege of Derry and drink to the immortal memory of William III. as though the former were events of yesterday and the latter an active figure in present-day politics. They still speak of the Pope as though a new Armada were on the point of sailing. "Were I to retort the abuse with which my own creed is daily bespattered," says Mr. Kettle, "I should describe the Ulster Orangeman as the only victim of clerical obscurantism to be found in Ireland. Herded beyond the unbridged waters of the Boyne, he has been forced to live in a very Tibet of intellectual isolation." The favorite conventional objurgation of the true-blue Ulsterman is, "To Hell with the Pope!" One of his minor amusements is chalking up reflections on the Catholics and their religion on walls and public buildings. The tale is told of an old Orangeman who had been called as a witness to the peaceable disposition of a friend of his. "What sort of man," asked the counsel, "would you say Jamie Williamson is?" "A quiet, decent man." "Is he the sort of man that would be likely to be breaking windows?" "No man less likely." "Is he the sort of man that you would expect to find at the head of a mob shouting 'To Hell with the Pope?'" Witness, with great emphasis: "No, certainly not. Jamie was never any ways a *religious* man." The deliciousness of that single adjective is more revealing than a whole library of labored comment. It is all of a part with the Belfast manufacturer who vehemently exclaims, "No man shall call me a bigot; but if Home Rule comes I'll sack every damned Catholic in my shop"; and with the Orange reveller who after hurling a "To Hell with the Pope" at a couple of passing Catholics, turned round to a near-by Protestant clergyman and said,

apologetically, "Your riverence, there's nothin' like givin' these fellows a varse o' Scripthur now an' again."

The fact is that the terms Protestant and Catholic carry with them in the northeast corner of Ireland a significance and implication that they have long since lost everywhere else. To be an Ulster Protestant is not merely to subscribe to a certain creed, but to be the heir of a vivid and martial history and of rights and liberties fought for and won on the field of battle. It is to be a member of a colonizing caste, a superior race, a higher civilization; while to be a Catholic is to be branded with the mark of a conquered people. That literally is how thousands upon thousands of Orangemen look upon themselves and upon the "Papists." They have the unmixed, unsophisticated, unconscious arrogance of men who have never been told, and most certainly have never imagined, that they are not infinitely better than their neighbors. And everything they see around them tends to confirm them in their inherited prepossessions. They see their own co-religionists "on top," owning and managing all the big industries and all the public institutions, while the Catholics for the most part are their shiftless dependents. My personal observations when I was last in Belfast confirmed the impression that the Catholics there are not the equals of the Protestants; they have not the same toughness of fiber; they live in a squalor that no Protestant would tolerate for a moment; anybody who passes from the Catholic to the Protestant quarters in the city is conscious at once of a different social atmosphere; and local experts can usually tell by a mere glance at a man's clothes and appearance, or at his children, or at his farm, to which of the two rival communions he belongs. All this counts. It helps to confirm the Orangeman's conviction that "Papists" are a naturally lower order of people, with a debased standard of living, and that it is his divine right to keep them in a due state of subjection. That they should be put on an equality with him is monstrous; that they should be set above him is something very like sacrilege. One must remember, too, that the average Ulsterman knows as little of the rest of Ireland as the average American knows, say, of Mexico. He does not read anything except the Belfast newspapers; he does not travel through the south and west; if you were to tell him that it is not the factory but the farm that produces most of the

wealth of Ireland, that the ratable value of Leinster, excluding Dublin, is greater than that of Ulster, excluding Belfast, or that there are Catholic farmers who live as well as Belfast manufacturers and have as ample a bank account, he would be simply and unflatteringly incredulous. He lives in a little world of hallucinations that is all his own, and if he is a Belfast artisan or loafer there is nothing he likes better than a "mix-up" in the streets with a crowd of Catholics. "The Belfast Orangeman," Mr. Seumas MacManus, has written, "who always realizes that he is the bulwark of the Protestant faith, attends his church regularly thrice in a lifetime—at baptism, marriage, and burial. In the cause of that faith, which he leaves to the more leisured and less worthy to practise, he is willing to sacrifice anything, even life itself—his neighbor's life, of course. He is the man who, in workman's dress, in the gallery of a theater, passed down cabbages, curses, and aged eggs to the unfortunate fellow who played the Friar in one of Shakespeare's plays. He will unquestionably fight if Home Rule comes. He will fight if anything comes. Or he will fight if nothing comes. Nor will he use the antiquated arms imported from Italy, either. He is a man whose picture of Heaven is a pocketful of iron nuts, the shelter of a side street, and a 'Papist' procession passing by. The rebellion he launches will last as long as the supply of nuts, bolts, kidneys, and whiskey hold out."

I need hardly say that with such inflammable material to work upon there is no lack of hands willing to stoke the fire, and that the ministers of the gospel, especially among a given sect, are, as usual, doing what they can to raise passion to a white heat. There are pastors in Belfast to-day who are talking and acting like so many Mohammedan Mullahs preaching a Holy War. All the detestation of Rome that animated the England of the sixteenth century is nakedly, shamelessly alive and operative in the northeast of Ireland to-day. The Protestant pulpits resound with comparisons between the Israelites and the Ulstermen, the first relieved from the bondage of Egypt, the second from slavery to the "Papists"; and the devil's brew of sectarian bigotry is being handed out in the form of barely veiled incitements to the roughs of the city to attempt a massacre of their Catholic fellow-subjects. A correspondent of the *Times*, in the course of a pilgrimage through

Ulster in July, reported a conversation he had had with an Antrim farmer. "Let them do what they will," exclaimed this stalwart, "we will have no priest-ridden Ulster. Let the word be given, and there won't be a Papist left in Antrim." There you have the brutal fact that lies behind Ulsteria. It is a fact, I need hardly say, concealed from the British public as much as possible. It wears too ugly, too antiquated, too uncivilized a look for British consumption; and Sir Edward Carson, to do him justice, is probably in his heart of hearts as much revolted by it as any one. He is an Irishman, but not an Ulsterman; there is no trace of the *odium theologicum* in his disposition; he voted in Parliament for the setting-up of a Catholic University in Ireland and for the alteration in the Royal Coronation Oath—measures that the Ulster M. P.'s vehemently but vainly opposed; and he has refrained from pandering to the rabid zealotry of his followers. None the less there stands the unedifying and indisputable fact that it is this historic feud between Protestants and Catholics that furnishes the motive-power for most of the Anti-Home-Rule agitation. You will find in Belfast hundreds and thousands of men who veritably believe that Home Rule means Rome Rule, and that a Dublin Parliament will not only tax industrial Ulster out of existence, but will deprive Protestants of their farms, close their workshops, take away their schools, force them to attend Mass, and probably dissolve their marriages by Papal decree.

That is the way the baser mind of Belfast works. In the country districts matters, as a rule, are better. The Orange farmer, a sturdy, warm-hearted, thoroughly human fellow, does undoubtedly and sincerely fear and hate "the power of Rome"—which in Ireland, by the by, is almost wholly mythical—and the character and policy and organization of the Irish priesthood; but he lives peacefully enough side by side with his Catholic neighbors, despising them, of course, as "priest-ridden," and by no means relishing the prospect of having to "even himself down" to the level of his former subordinates, but still without the faintest intention of resisting Home Rule by force. Belfast, and the Belfast temper, are really the crux of the situation; and it would be a highly diverting enterprise to trace out the amazing consequences that have flowed from the domination of the masses by the sectarian controversy. For here we have a city

which, as I have said, bears no small resemblance on its industrial side to Chicago; it ought to be, and in time it undoubtedly will be, as democratic in its politics as it is in its essential spirit; it has many grave social, housing, and industrial problems on which it has neglected to vent its "religious" spleen; and the strongest passion that animates its workers is a medieval sentiment of ignorant bigotry. Any one who is used to the ways of politicians could probably forecast at once the resultant of these various forces. The great urban and rural landlords, the captains of industry, and the inevitable army of lawyers and politicians have turned the religious enthusiasm of the masses to their own ends—the landlords to keep up rents and stave off agrarian agitation, the manufacturers to divert attention from the sweating and the slums that disgrace Belfast, and the lawyers to get into Parliament and annex all the jobs in sight. By using the rawness of the Orange creed as a laughable stepping-stone to place and power and by trading on the passions that have made the "lower classes" the blind and witless dupes of their own prejudices, the "leaders" have so manipulated the course of affairs that a profoundly Radical community is represented in Parliament almost entirely by Tory merchants, lawyers, landlords, and their agents, and the illusion has been created that loyalty to the British Crown and the cause of Protestantism are bound up in voting for an endless array of reactionary barristers, property-owners, and wealthy manufacturers. Never, I suppose, in the history of politics was a greater confidence trick so easily and successfully played off on an unsuspecting electorate. Yet I am bound to add that in talking to the industrial "magnates" I found not a few of them just as bigoted and myopic as any "corner-boy" of them all, and just as much under the sway of a compound of fears, instincts, hatreds, and traditions in which facts had been metamorphosed out of all semblance to reality. There are business men in Belfast whose names are known all over the world with whom you can no more argue Irish questions than you can argue the race question with a Tennessee planter of the old school. Keen and unclouded reasoners in matters of business, they can only feel when it comes to a question of politics or religion. All that they ask of the rest of Ireland is to let them alone. They are prosperous, contented, and free; and they are profoundly convinced that an

Irish Parliament, mainly elected by rural votes, will use Ulster and its industries and its accumulated wealth as a milch-cow for the Treasury. That is, indeed, their only respectable argument—I might almost say their only argument at all; and it would not, I think, be difficult to show that there is very little in it and that a Nationalist Parliament could only tax Protestants by taxing Catholics at the same time and that any attempt to discriminate against Ulster would turn out to be impossible in practice. But undoubtedly this apprehension of being unduly taxed is a legitimate point to bring forward. Practically everything else in the Unionist case is mere wind and hysteria. Ulster indeed is most impressive when it follows its usual course, drops argument altogether, and baldly proclaims, “We will not have Home Rule!”

Sir Edward Carson’s campaign and the preparations that have been made for resisting Home Rule by force have been thoroughly in keeping with the Ulster atmosphere and its mirages that confuse the vision and distort realities. The dummy cannon, the reviews and salutes the perpetual cameras and reporters, the signing of Covenants, the screeching and bellowings, the contingent threats of treason, the dress-suit Provisional Government, the indemnity fund to guarantee all “rebels” against personal loss, the slimy trail of the lawyer and the press-agent over a movement that professes to be a fight for religious and political freedom—all these phenomena are entirely in harmony with a city of innumerable Tartarins where nothing outside of business is seen quite straight. That many have thrown in their lot with Carsonism through compulsion and under protest and with a great many mental reservations and in order to avoid social or business ostracism, and that to keep the agitation going a good deal of “persuasion” has had to be employed, is no doubt the case. But that at bottom the movement is genuine and sincere is a point on which I am definitely convinced. People are wrong who think that Ulster is bluffing. Ulster never bluffs. Occasionally things do not happen as Ulster swears and takes solemn pledges that they will happen. But that does not prove that Ulster is bluffing; it merely proves that Ulster’s judgment is sometimes at fault. If I am skeptical of Carsonism, it is not because I question the enthusiasm of its adherents, but because, so far as I can see, it is attempting an almost im-

possible task with third-rate leaders and inadequate resources. As a believer in the virtues of universal military service, it has been, indeed, a real pleasure to me to think of these young men in Ulster spending laborious days and nights in the open air at drill and camp and target practice and manœuvres. But I cannot bring myself to rate them very highly as a fighting force or to regard them, with their insurance policies in their pockets, as the stuff out of which successful rebellions are made. They are evidence of a temper and a state of mind, but not, in my judgment, an earnest of achievement; and the idea of pitting them against the British Army no longer holds its old place in the revolutionary councils. It has to all appearances been thrown overboard in favor of establishing a Provisional Government that will seize on all the machinery of administration in the four counties and hold them for the Protestant and Unionist cause.

But if I am dubious about Sir Edward Carson's "army," I am ten times more so about his scheme for superseding British authority in the name of loyalty to the British Crown. Just consider some of the more obvious aspects of the situation that would arise if the Provisional Government were ever to come into being. The first consequence of all would be a financial crisis and a panic run on the local banks. Lombard Street would raise its rates on the Belfast banks, the Belfast banks would raise theirs on the local manufacturers, many of whom do business on a conspicuously small margin, the Catholic depositors would make haste to withdraw their moneys, and loans would be called in right and left. By simply removing its staff from the Belfast post-offices the British Government could at a stroke deprive the city of letters, telephone, telegraph, and cable services. Industry would be brought to a standstill, the streets would be swarming with hungry and turbulent unemployed, and the "army" of the Provisional Government would find itself fully occupied in protecting Protestant shops against the inroads of starving Protestant workingmen. Besides policing the city in the interests of its own partisans, the Provisional Government would have to raise a gigantic sum of money for purposes of outdoor relief. All Imperial grants, such as those for education, local government, public works, and so on, would presumably be cut off; old-age pensions would cease to be paid; there would be nothing

with which to finance the Insurance Act; no Belfast merchant could sue for debt in any other part of the United Kingdom; no barrister under the Provisional Government could practise outside the four counties; there would be an absolute paralysis of all commercial and public life. The enterprise, in short, would speedily collapse of its own weight and without a single British soldier being moved; while as for Ulster's threat to resist Home Rule by the non-payment of taxes, the only way in which that resolution could be enforced would be by Ulster's refusing to import and to manufacture and to smoke and drink. The more the scheme is examined the more preposterously hopeless does it appear. It has failed to alarm the Nationalists in the least. They have heard more or less similar menaces before. "The fact is," said Mr. Redmond not long ago, "these threats about civil war impose upon nobody in Ireland and upon nobody outside of Ireland who is not invincibly ignorant or wilfully misled by bigotry and race hatred. We in Ireland have heard all these threats before, and we pay no more regard to them now than our fathers did when, in 1827, the Orangemen conspired to depose William IV., to put the Duke of Cumberland on the throne, and to deprive the Princess Victoria of her right of succession; or when, in 1869, they threatened, if the Church Disestablishment Act were passed, to discrown the Queen, and to kick her crown into the Boyne. We remember how, when the Princess Ena was married to the King of Spain, Orange orators insulted King Edward, and reminded him of the fate of James and Charles and Buckingham, and we know that the only outcome of the Orange braggadocio in 1886 was the murder of a poor Catholic youth on Queen's Island and the wrecking and plundering of Catholic houses in Belfast."

None the less if the Home Rule Bill becomes law in its present form, trouble of some kind in Belfast, and perhaps also in the adjacent counties, is inevitable, and it will probably take the form of an onslaught on the Catholic residents, that would leave behind it a bitter legacy of racial hatred. On every ground it would be infinitely preferable if the problem of Irish Government could be settled, as the far older and more contentious problem of Irish land-tenure was settled, by compromise and consent. Many steps to that end are being taken and many projects mooted as I write; but it

is impossible at present to say what, if anything, will come of them. There may be a Conference such as Lord Loreburn has proposed, between the leaders of all parties. There may be a General Election which will remove the very solid objection that the opinion of the country has never been taken on the Home Rule Bill. There may be an agreement to leave the four Protestant counties in Ulster outside the scope of the Irish Government. What I believe to be impossible is that the prejudices and opposition of Ulster will be allowed to kill the Bill or to stand in the way of that autonomy which four-fifths of the Irish people undoubtedly desire. Ireland is going to have Home Rule, and for myself I have never weakened in my confidence that when it has been granted and is in working order and experience has demonstrated the baselessness of their apprehensions, the Ulstermen will speedily become, as their fathers were in the eighteenth century, the stoutest and most thoroughgoing champions of Irish Nationality and of the rights and powers of the Irish Parliament.

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